FIRE CHIEFS GET RESCUED

"For our Fire Chiefs, fast access to actionable, timely data gets results. With Crystal Reports, they gain better insight into their departments' performance levels, and can work more productively to improve citizen's safety in the San Diego area."
Charles Alexander, Division Manager, Heartland Communications

Industry
Government – fire and emergency services

Business Pain
Fire chiefs and emergency management personnel needed easy access to Web-based, professional looking reports to better understand their departments' operations and to support applications for funding.

Why Business Objects?
Crystal Reports is user-friendly and provides flexible, Web-based multi-dimensional reporting.

Business Objects Products and Services
Crystal Reports XI
Crystal Reports Server XI

CHALLENGE

More than 640,000 Californians in San Diego County rely on the emergency dispatch services provided by Heartland Communications. Heartland's 14 dispatchers received approximately 52,000 calls in 2007, routing them to any of 27 different agencies that service a total of 2,200 square miles. Covering both urban and back country scenarios, the goal is always the same: provide the most efficient response to every emergency situation, while ensuring safety for first responders and citizens alike.

As the umbrella organization coordinating dispatch and first responder services among different agencies, Heartland Communications is responsible for providing up-to-date statistical information to all of its member agencies. The Fire Chiefs and other personnel who manage these agencies rely on this information to make budget and operational decisions.

Heartland Communications had a reporting solution that was built by a third-party vendor to deliver data from its Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) solution to the Fire Chiefs. The data is housed in a Microsoft SQL Server database. However, the existing reporting solution was slow and cumbersome and it didn't have a native Web interface, which spelled poor service for some of the volunteer fire departments in the back country that relied on direct dial or satellite Internet access to connect to Heartland Communication's secure intranet where the reports were housed.

Even in urban settings, busy Fire Chiefs had to wait many minutes for the reports that they needed for budget or board meetings. It was difficult to export the reports into Excel, and they did not present a professional image. This was a serious drawback because Fire Chiefs used them to support funding requests or to make a business cases to state and federal funding agencies.

"The Chiefs wanted easy, Web-based access to live statistical information to better understand their call volumes, operations, financial status, and to plan service levels and write up budget proposals," says Charles Alexander, Division Manager at Heartland Communications. "But most importantly, they needed secure, accurate information that they can slice and dice to support their rationale behind funding applications. After all, governments only have a fixed amount of dollars to allocate among competing agencies."

Heartland Communications needed a business intelligence infrastructure that would provide a high level of service to all agencies. The solution had to be simple, responsive, and user-friendly.

APPROACH

Alexander decided to deploy Crystal Reports, the award-winning reporting tool from Business Objects to provide a business intelligence infrastructure that enables simple, Web-based information access for the 27 agencies that Heartland Communications serves. Unlike other vendors that Alexander evaluated, Crystal Reports provides a native driver to rapidly access live data from Heartland Communications' CAD system and it also speaks the SQL language natively. For those reasons, the new reporting solution delivers presentation quality reports in seconds, compared to five minutes. And because Crystal Reports generates HTML directly, Fire Chiefs in back country departments are enjoying 50 percent faster page loads. Reports can be exported and repurposed to Excel, which is preferred format among many of the agencies' management personnel.

Alexander worked with 5X Technology, a Business Objects Value Added Reseller Partner to help upgrade the existing reports to create secure, professional looking documents that are readily available when a Fire Chief needs them. "5X Technology consultants were invaluable in helping us to refine and reformat our reports," says Alexander. "They also introduced us to Live Office."

BusinessObjects Live Office integrates with Microsoft Office, embedding current corporate data in Microsoft PowerPoint, Excel, and Word documents. "In Heartland's case, the Fire Chiefs wanted to have their information readily available in PowerPoint for their council meetings," explains Jeffrey Yefsky, Senior Partner at 5X Technology. "We configured the connection through Live Office so that all they have to do is enter their user name and password and update their current reports to be delivered in pre-set PowerPoint slides. Now they don't have to recreate a PowerPoint presentation every month."

5X Technology also helped Alexander and his team to tailor the solution so that each department's information is secure. "Each department has an ID number that we put on the reports, so I can assign data to department-specific reports," says Alexander. "We can take a single report that says how many calls for service did I have for a time period and lock it down to each department. However, it's easy to duplicate that report for each department simply by changing the ID number. This helps each agency focus on its own data when applying for budget increases."

Today, 27 Fire Chiefs and more than 50 management personnel access more than 500 Crystal Reports available on Heartland Communications' intranet.

RESULTS

"Our Fire Chiefs have gained valuable insight into their operations with our new Business Objects reporting solution," says Alexander. "The solution is user friendly, it creates professional looking reports, and it's efficient. With Crystal Reports, the Fire Chiefs are empowered to take care of their own information needs."

Today, the Chiefs can log onto the intranet site, where there are a dozen or more reports waiting for each department. If they want to look at dispatch statistics or analyze truck statistics they can click on the report, fill in a date range, and click OK. "Chiefs can print out the report on the way to the City Manager's office and it looks great. It's got the department's logo, and on the bottom of the page it shows who ran the report and when," says Alexander. "There's a

summary first page and subsequent pages that drill into the numbers. That was huge for the Chiefs. It's so easy that I don't have to get involved."

Armed with these reports, Fire Chiefs and other management personnel are better prepared to make their business cases with city and county officials when applying for budget increases. For several departments, this has been the key success factor in recent applications. "Recently, an urban fire department approached city council with a request for another ladder truck. When you are sitting in a city official's office, you can't afford to lose the momentum by saying I have to come back to you with that data. The Chief was able to show him numbers for every question he asked. They were able to justify their request and received the funding."

The Chiefs are also using their Business Objects reporting solution to look back at previous incidents, like the recent fires around San Diego winds, to improve safety for the future. "They can look back and analyze Santa Ana wind speed and patterns, which influence smoke distribution and the resulting respiratory issues that personnel might face in the field," explains Alexander.

Chiefs also use the solution to gain insight into their operations so they can optimize their funding and provide better service to the community, while working in conjunction with neighboring agencies. Using Crystal Reports and performing "what if" scenarios, Fire Chiefs and emergency service personnel in one department analyzed call volumes, response times, and how frequently they were bringing in ambulances from other agencies. They discovered they could absorb the costs of a new ambulance to provide better care for patients in their area. The Chief saw the mayor before the next council meeting, so the proposal got on the agenda for a vote.

"For our Fire Chiefs, fast access to actionable, timely data get's results," concludes Alexander. "With Crystal Reports, they gain better insight into their departments' performance levels, and can work more productivity to improve citizen's safety in the San Diego area."

businessobjects.com

insight.businessobjects.com

Business Objects™